

Given your interest in environmental issues, I wanted to share some thoughts on the Obama Administration recently celebrating "Endangered Species Day" and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as the "nation's premier law protecting biodiversity." I was troubled to see this commemoration because those of us in Northern California have little reason to celebrate this misguided environmental law. While the ESA was enacted with the laudable goal of protecting and conserving species for future generations, for over three decades it has instead provided the "nation's premier" methods of infringing upon private property rights and multiple-use of federal lands, derailing the construction and operation of much-needed infrastructure, and even threatening public health and safety, all while failing to meet the goals of species protection.

We all want a safe and healthy environment and healthy species populations, but these priorities need not carry a crippling cost. The ESA first struck the North State in full force with the infamous listing of the spotted owl. After twenty years of federal lands being closed off to forest management in the interest of protecting the spotted owl, countless acres of the owl's habitat continue to be consumed each year by the same catastrophic wildfire that threatens our homes and communities. The scant remains of our once vibrant timber industry continue to be a poster child of the illogical consequences of the ESA and its abuse by environmental activists, not to mention a failure to achieve measureable results for the spotted owl.

In 2001, we witnessed the federal government shut off irrigation deliveries to nearly 1,200 farm families in the Klamath Basin in order to preserve water for sucker fish and salmon. A national panel of scientists, the National Academy of Sciences, subsequently reviewed the flawed science and concluded that shutting off the water – and the severe social and economic harm that resulted - was not justified. Fast forward to today and the ESA has resulted in circumstances by which a private company has determined that decommissioning its hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River is actually a more cost-effective option than implementing mitigation measures to continue operating the facilities in compliance with the law and under constant threat of expensive litigation. Perhaps the most egregious case is the breaching of the Arboga Levee in Yuba County during the 1997 flood that tragically claimed the lives of three people. Much-needed repairs to known deficiencies in the levee were delayed for nearly seven years due to the presence of habitat for a species listed under the ESA.

These are just a few examples of how the well-intentioned but unbalanced ESA has caused incredible economic and social harm to the citizens of Northern California and the nation. To add insult to injury, there is no clear evidence that a single species has recovered as a result of the ESA alone since it simply serves as a command-and-control umbrella to a number of other laws aimed at wildlife protection. Broad-based efforts to bring balance to the ESA have been, and continue to be, thwarted by fringe groups and their hold on Washington. Even targeted,

emergency measures, such as legislation I introduced following the Arboga tragedy to allow flexibility under the ESA to repair levees, have been defeated by radical environmentalists and the politicians they support who refuse to accept even the most commonsense changes to the ESA’s unyielding directives.

But I believe you are not beat until you quit, and I will continue working to reform this law and educate the public on its impacts on average Americans. Making people aware of the simple facts will be a crucial part of succeeding in this fight. At some point the American public must acknowledge the reality that it is neither practical nor possible for us to continue providing for species in the “take it or leave it” manner dictated by the ESA that gives the needs of people a backseat to plant and animal species. I urge the Obama Administration to join with me and other supporters of a more commonsense approach in a sincere reform effort instead of lauding the “success” of a law that has been devastating for rural America.